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Ethnic Russians in the Baltic States and Russia's Foreign Policy

by

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requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians living in the former republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have alleged that their civil and human rights are being violated. The issue has generated a great deal of concern from both progressive and conservative elements within the Russian government. Although Russia has vital military and economic interests in the Baltic region, and the human rights problem could possibly play into the hands of those who would use the issue as a pretext for maintaining a military presence in the area, this thesis will examine the possibility that the human rights agenda is not so much a cover for geostrategic interests as it is a political problem that facilitates the Russian foreign policy for keeping a foothold in the Baltic States. The situation may also represent a beneficial condition for the Russian military who have been pressing for support of a foreign policy that would discontinue the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics, retain a Russian military presence in the area, and address their interests and concerns.

C.1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. BACKGROUND.....	1
B. OBJECTIVES.....	5
C. RESEARCH QUESTION.....	5
D. SCOPE.....	6
E. METHODOLOGY.....	7
1. Importance Of Thesis.....	8
2. Literature Review.....	8
F. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY.....	11
G. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	12
II. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES (1992).....	15
A. BACKGROUND.....	15
B. ETHNIC RUSSIANS.....	16
1. Demographic Significance.....	16
2. Citizenship And Voting.....	18
3. Discrimination/Human Rights Violations.....	21

C. BALTIC REACTION TO DISCRIMINATION CHARGES.....	23
1. Validity Of Charges/Grievances.....	23
2. Perspective Of The Baltic Citizen.....	25
3. Concern Over Russian Response.....	26
D. EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.....	29
1. Baltic Request For Independent Review.....	29
2. Response To Baltic Overtures.....	31
III. RUSSIAN POSITION.....	34
A. BACKGROUND.....	34
B. GOVERNMENTS RESPONSE TO ALLEGED DISCRIMINATION.....	35
1. Issue Gaining Momentum.....	35
2. Protecting Ethnic Russians.....	37
3. Linkage Question.....	39
4. Divisive Concern.....	40
C. CURRENT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS.....	46
1. Linkage With Troop Withdrawal.....	46
2. Sanctions.....	48
3. European/International Organizations.....	49
D. SECURITY IMPLICATIONS/REGIONAL STABILITY.....	51
1. NATO.....	52
2. Other Organizations.....	53

IV. ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL RUSSIAN MOTIVES.....	56
A. BACKGROUND.....	56
B. IMMEDIATE RUSSIAN CONCERNS.....	57
1. Treatment Of Russian Soldiers.....	58
2. Adequate Housing.....	61
3. Prudence With Hasty Withdrawal.....	64
C. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS.....	65
1. Military Installations.....	66
2. Strategic Early Warning Radar.....	67
3. Security Buffer.....	68
D. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS: PRETENSE FOR AMBITION..	69
1. Russian Policies/Interests.....	69
2. Russian Presence.....	76
V. CONCLUSION.....	81
ENDNOTES.....	87
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST.....	103

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in former republics once considered part of the empire, ethnic Russians and Russian speakers now find themselves on the periphery of the Russian State. In some of these areas, ethnic Russians have allegedly been subjected to ethnic prejudice and discrimination.

The plight of ethnic Russians in the former Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania appear, at least on the surface, to be following a similar trajectory of prejudice and discrimination as that of their Russian comrades residing in other former republics.

The issue of human rights violations against ethnic Russians in the Baltics is a complex matter requiring thoughtful consideration of the variables at play and a recognition that other, possibly more profound and certainly more contentious, issues are brewing beneath the surface.

This thesis will argue that the Russian human rights agenda is not necessarily a cover for geostrategic interests, but a political problem that facilitates a Russian foreign policy for keeping a foothold in the Baltic States. The issue may play into the hands of some who would use it as a pretext for maintaining a military presence, but it also plays into the hands of the Russian military who have been pressing for support of a foreign policy that

would discontinue the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics, retain a military presence in the area, and address their interests and concerns.

There are certainly reasons to suspect that discrimination is occurring in the three Baltic States and for good reason. Ethnic Russians residing in these countries represent the embodiment of their Soviet oppressors. One can see why human and civil rights violations such as unfair housing practices, stiff language requirements for citizenship, and no voting privileges, in some people's minds, are legitimate political, moral, and ethical paybacks for the brutal occupation of their countries.

The current Russian government is concerned about the plight of ethnic Russians living in the Baltics, and numerous diplomatic overtures and protests have been levied at the Baltic States for these alleged violations. The governments of the Baltic States have categorically denied that any organized, government sanctioned form of discrimination is taking place. They have also refuted Russian accusations as to the perceived severity and degree of these alleged violations. Therefore, it is possible to speculate about the veracity of these claims and questions can also be raised about Russian policies for responding to this issue in the fashion they have responded.

The objective of this thesis is to examine the Russian policy toward Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in conjunction with the alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians currently living in the Baltics. Specifically, this paper will explore the validity of these allegations as viewed by the various parties

involved, and it will discuss possible foreign policy measures that could be employed by the Russian government in this region.

Comprehending the policies and interests of the Russian government in their treatment of this issue, may indeed be the cornerstone in laying a broader foundation for an appreciation of the operational variables through which the Russian government must perform.

East European stability and security depend upon an awareness of this problem. By assessing the meaning and consequences that result from Russia's policies toward the Baltics, international and European organizations can develop and adopt strategies designed to defuse rising tensions, reconcile grievances, encourage negotiations, or counter intrusive Russian behavior.

The difficulties faced by ethnic Russians living on the perimeter of Russia has raised the level of concern in various circles of the Russian government to a point where, today, it is an issue of enormous political importance.

Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister, Andrei Kosyrev, have been under intense pressure by both conservative and liberal elements of the government who have criticized their attempts to resolve this issue. This criticism represents an underlying lack of confidence concerning the issue of ethnic Russians in the Baltics, and it is symptomatic of even greater problems the Yeltsin government faces in its quest for a democratic, market oriented society.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, in former republics once considered part of the empire, now find themselves outside of the periphery of the Russian State. In some of these areas, ethnic Russians have allegedly been subjected to ethnic prejudice and discrimination.

The plight of ethnic Russians in the former Baltic Republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania appear, at least on the surface, to be following a similar trajectory of prejudice and discrimination as that of their Russian comrades residing in other former republics.

The issue of human rights violations against ethnic Russians in the Baltics is a complex matter that requires consideration of the many variables involved and a recognition that other, possibly more profound and certainly more contentious, issues are brewing beneath the surface.

This thesis will argue that the human rights agenda is not necessarily a cover for geostrategic interests, but a political problem that facilitates a Russian foreign policy for keeping a foothold in the Baltic States. Indeed, the issue may play into the hands of those who would use it as a pretext for

maintaining a military presence, but it also plays into the hands of the Russian military who have been pressing for support of a foreign policy that would discontinue the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics, retain a military presence in the area, and address their interests and concerns.

Looking at the issue from a simplistic point of view, one could argue that there are indeed reasons to suspect that discrimination is occurring in various degrees of intensity in the three Baltic States, and for good reason.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are nationalistic countries. The citizens of each state have strong patriotic feelings for their countries and their heritage of independence and freedom.

Historically, the three states have very little in common. Lithuania is predominately Catholic, and it was both independent and powerful for centuries. Independence was not particularly long lived in the other two Lutheran states of Estonia and Latvia.¹

Prior to World War I, all three countries were dominated, during different periods, by Swedish, Polish, and Russian rulers. At the end of the war, all three Baltic States were successful in acquiring independence. In each case, German occupation forces had to be removed and Bolshevik/Communist elements were defeated and pushed out. Independence was achieved, and democratic forms of government were initiated.²

Estonian independence was officially recognized by major Western powers in 1921. Similarly, Latvia achieved full independence by 1922 and Lithuania by 1920. In each case, their democracies were replaced by authoritarian rule which lasted until independence was lost on 23 August 1939 with the signing of the USSR/Germany non-aggression treaty (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) and the Secret Supplementary Protocol which provided for the occupation of Estonia, Latvia, and later Lithuania by Soviet troops.³

Almost immediately the Soviets created an economic upheaval with the introduction of industrialization and collectivization. Social and political turmoil existed on a vast human scale that included religious persecution, deportations by the thousands, and imprisonment and executions of Baltic citizens that numbered in the hundreds of thousands. This tyranny was briefly interrupted by German oppression during World War II, but following the war, Soviet domination resumed in full stride.⁴

Various dissident organizations, in each Baltic State, resisted valiantly against the communist regime, but not until Gorbachev's glasnost did dissent spread beyond the immediate domain of these groups. The resurgence in Baltic nationalism, patriotism, and pride resulted in each state taking bold steps to regain their independence. The Soviet response, although predictable, declared these attempts at independence unconstitutional. In January 1991, troops intervened in Latvia and Lithuania in an unsuccessful attempt to restore order and bring the wayward republics back into the fold,

but by 22 August 1991, with the failed coup, it was evident the Soviet Union had collapsed. By the end of August, numerous countries had recognized the Baltic republics as sovereign states. On 4 September, the USSR State Council recognized the independence of each Baltic State.⁵ Today, independence and democracy are fledgling concepts to the Baltic region. Politicians of the three nations, recognizing the interdependence upon which their independence rests, have forged a Baltic Council representing an “embryo” of regional cooperation.⁶

Ethnic Russians residing in these countries represent the embodiment of their Soviet oppressors. One can see why human and civil rights violations such as unfair housing practices, stiff language requirements for citizenship, and no voting privileges, in some people’s minds, are legitimate political, moral, and ethical paybacks for the brutal occupation of their countries.

Naturally, the current Russian government is concerned about the plight of ethnic Russians living in the Baltics, and numerous diplomatic overtures and protests have been levied at the Baltic States for these alleged violations. The governments of the Baltic States have categorically and repeatedly denied that any organized, systematic, government sanctioned form of discrimination is taking place. They have also refuted Russian accusations as to the perceived severity and degree of these alleged violations.

Therefore, it is possible to speculate about the veracity of these claims given the ethnic Russian grievances and the Baltics resolute defense. Additionally, questions can also be raised about Russian motives for responding to this issue in the fashion they have responded.

B. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this thesis is to examine the Russian policy toward Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in conjunction with the alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians currently living in the Baltics. Specifically, this paper will explore the validity of these allegations as viewed by the various parties involved. As a result of the research, the paper will propose possible motives for current Russian involvement and attitudes in this region, and also discuss foreign policy measures that could be employed by the Russian government to protect and defend Russian interests vital to its security and economic well-being.

C. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question revolves around Russian intentions. Are there elements of the Russian government, such as Foreign Minister Kosyrev, who are genuinely concerned about a resolution to the alleged human rights violations of ethnic Russians? Do conservatives, such as State Counselor Stankevich, wish to maintain a presence in the Baltic region under the pretense of monitoring the human rights problem, when, in fact, they wish to remain for military and economic interests which are vital to Russia's

security and economic well-being? Or, is there a confluence of issues that, when combined, all have a bearing on the formulation of Russian foreign policy with regard to the Baltic States? Issues to be addressed in conjunction with the thesis question include:

- The essence of allegations of Ethnic Russian rights violations.
- Voting and citizenship laws for each Baltic State.
- The Baltic States response to these alleged violations.
- The Russian governments response to alleged violations.
- The Russian governments foreign policy alternatives.
- Security implications and their impact on regional stability.
- Additional issues linked to the human rights problem.
- Russian alternatives in which to exploit the discrimination issue.

D. SCOPE

The focus of this thesis will be on the alleged discrimination of ethnic Russians in the Baltic States and an examination of ancillary issues that have an impact on Russian foreign policy in this area. This paper maintains that the issue of ethnic discrimination and human rights violations, although significant in its own right, is but the tip of the iceberg. The thesis will demonstrate that Russia's interests in the Baltic region go well beyond the defense of ethnic Russian's rights. It is likely that the rights issue represents a political problem that facilitates the Russian foreign policy for maintaining a presence in the Baltic States be it negotiated or imposed.

E. METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the relevant aspects related to the scope of the thesis argument, I will use a synthesis of both qualitative empirical analysis and normative analysis in order to describe and explain the political and social events transpiring in the Baltic countries. Using a combination of these two techniques, I hope to eliminate the pitfall of introducing analytical bias and maximize an understanding of these events in terms of a comprehensive treatment of the evidence.⁷

To obtain such evidence, I have conducted a comprehensive search for both primary source material and secondary literature that address the principle and ancillary factors attributable to this issue. This material includes acquisitions of scholarly works, journal reviews, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, in-depth analytical articles contained in RFE/RL Research Reports, and primary source material such as FBIS and RFE/RL Daily Reports.

I have also conducted a literature review to explore the historical corollary between the current events transpiring in the Baltics and other examples of ethnic strife that created problems during the interwar years. The relevance of this review is not to confirm the old maxim that history repeats itself, or that past events in any way have a direct bearing on the ultimate outcome of the Baltic dilemma. By approaching it from the rational actor level of analysis, I hope such a review will provide an insight into, (1) any

correlations that illustrate the factors currently affecting the decision making process of the actors in the Baltic region compared to the interests and objectives that drove the decision making process in other cases where ethnic rivalries created dissention, and (2) what we can learn from such an analysis in terms of the similarities of the policies that result.⁸

1. Importance Of Thesis

The importance of this study is crucial to an understanding of the various elements in the human rights mosaic currently coloring the political canvas of the Baltic Region.

Comprehending the motives and interests of the Russian government in their treatment of this issue, may indeed be the cornerstone in laying a broader foundation for an appreciation of the operational variables through which the Russian government must perform.

The topic discussed in this paper is significant because East European stability and security depend upon an awareness of a problem with this magnitude. By assessing the meaning and consequences that result from Russia's policies toward the Baltics, international and European organizations can develop and adopt strategies designed to defuse rising tensions, reconcile grievances, encourage negotiations, or counter intrusive Russian behavior.

2. Literature Review

Karl Marx once postulated that history does, in fact, repeat itself. "The first time as tragedy, the second as farce."⁹ Certainly, to allow events to

acquire the momentum necessary to repeat a tragic situation is mankind's greatest folly.

What we are witnessing in the Baltic States resembles events that have been repeated in various countries in East Europe and elsewhere since states have decided to ignore the ethnic dimensions of territory and nationalism, and have quite arbitrarily established boundaries based on the capricious wishes, or designs, of royalty or heads of state.

An appreciation of this phenomena will hopefully provide a better understanding for why the Baltic problem should be of interest. The hope for regional stability, and the security of Europe, depends upon the lessons we can assimilate from prior misadventures and how we translate what we have learned into defining imperatives for action, or a recognition for the costs of neglect.

To acquire such an historical appreciation, a number of works were consulted on the topic of ethnic strife and the problems of ethnopolitics that developed in the interwar years from tinkering with national boundaries and the nationalistic feelings of the people that were aroused as a result.

One such area was the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. The ethnic Germans of the Sudetenland were fiercely nationalistic and considered themselves to be a part of greater Germany. They greatly resented having been placed within the state of Czechoslovakia following World War I.¹⁰

Another area where a great deal of ethnic engineering took place was the Soviet Union. During the interwar years, Stalin redefined borders and moved massive numbers of people from traditional homelands to other locales. The resultant ethnic tensions remained with the Soviet Union and its successor states. Until recent times, these tensions have been swept aside by brutal repression while the facade the USSR maintained was one of ethnic bliss. In reality, nothing could be farther from the truth. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, there was nothing to hold back the anger and hatred locked away for decades, and ethnic clashes erupted everywhere.

One such location is the Baltic region where ethnic hatreds have grown progressively worse. Not between the Baltic States themselves, but between the indigenous citizens of the Baltic countries and the Russian minorities living there.¹¹

The historical parallels between the ethnic clashes of the past, and the events taking place in the Baltic States today, suggest that the Baltic States face many of the same problems that other governments, such as Czechoslovakia, have faced.

The fact that the Baltic States face many of the same domestic issues the Czech government did, warrants a cautious approach to the manner in which they handle the current ethnic tensions.

Even more importantly, history has taught us to look beneath the surface and not accept things at face value. Although the Russian

government is concerned over the situation faced by ethnic Russians living in the Baltic countries, the issue may represent opportunities for the advancement of national interests that certain elements cannot overlook. As the paper will demonstrate, concern over ethnic discrimination and human rights may play into the hands of those who would use it as a pretext for the pursuit of these Russian interests.

F. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

The thesis is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter I: **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter II: **HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AS PERCEIVED IN
THE BALTIC STATES (1992)**

This chapter examines the issue of human rights violations and ethnic discrimination from the Baltic States Point of view. The problems associated with voting and citizenship laws will be discussed along with additional grievances of ethnic Russians. The chapter will also investigate the perspective of the Baltic citizen and the attitudes they have exhibited toward the Russian speaking population. Finally, attention will focus on the role outside European organizations have played in assessing the validity of the charges against the Baltic countries regarding rights violations.

Chapter III: **RUSSIAN POSITION**

This chapter examines the Russian response to charges made by ethnic Russians living in the Baltic States regarding alleged human rights violations

and the various policy options available to the Russian government to modify the Baltic States position and response to the charges. Additionally, the paper will inquire into Russia's utilization of various European and international organizations to elicit support for their position, and a discussion of the security implications for regional stability will follow.

Chapter IV: ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL RUSSIAN MOTIVES

This chapter looks at Russia's foreign policy from several different perspectives. A description of immediate concerns probes the Russian Foreign Ministry's concern for problems associated with the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baltic region and also the strategic implications such a withdrawal could have on Russian interests in the area. Then, an exploration of Russian interests and policies will help develop the thesis argument that the issue of rights violations is a political problem that is driving Russian foreign policy to support a military presence in the Baltic region.

Chapter V: CONCLUSION

This chapter will present conclusions base upon the findings and analysis drawn from the research.

G. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The difficulties faced by ethnic Russians living on the perimeter of Russia has raised the level of concern in various circles of the Russian

government to a point where, today, it is an issue of enormous political importance.

Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrei Kosyrev, have been under intense pressure by both conservative and liberal elements of the government to find a solution to this most thorny of issues. The problem is certainly in the public eye and criticism is flowing in from all corners complaining not just about the nature in which the government ministries are responding to the charges of rights violations, but questioning the fundamental principles of democracy and reform that constitute the bedrock of the Yeltsin administration.

This underlying lack of confidence concerning the issue of ethnic Russians in the Baltics is symptomatic of even greater problems the Yeltsin government faces in its quest for a democratic, market oriented society.

Because of this criticism, the Yeltsin government is taking an increasingly conservative stand on human rights violations with the Baltic States, and it has attempted to link the issue with continued withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics, threatened economic sanctions, attempted to coerce the Baltic States into building housing for returning Russian troops, and has even threatened to intervene militarily if the Baltics do not "shape up."

Interestingly, this last alternative, a destabilizing alternative for regional stability and of obvious alarm and concern for European organizations responsible for European security, may be exactly what

conservative elements in the government and military wish to see.

Intervention represents one avenue in the Russian arsenal of options to maintain a presence in the Baltics. It is entirely likely that in the months to come, the issue of human rights violations will facilitate a Russians foreign policy of retaining a presence in the Baltic States. The question is, with the Baltic countries calling for the Russian withdrawal, will the Russians ignore their wishes and remain anyway?

II. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE BALTIC STATES (1992)

A. BACKGROUND

The Baltic States have had difficulty with the current issue of alleged human rights violations of ethnic Russians because they view the matter from an entirely different perspective than the Russian government. The Baltic position has been one of state sovereignty and the right to determine how best to govern the peoples residing within their respective boundaries. They resent, and have resisted, attempts by the Russian military and foreign ministry to bully them into revising their approach to this problem and question the motives behind what they consider Russian meddling in their internal affairs.

Conversely, there are factions within the Russian government that have taken up the cause of alleged human rights violations in the Baltics. They have escalated the debate on the problem to the point where constant attention has been focused on this dilemma since the middle of 1992.

There has been little respite from the controversy with both sides appealing to European and international bodies for assistance. These organizations have not failed to take note of the developing crisis.

In this regard, it is necessary and important to examine the Baltic position on the factors pertaining to this issue, including a discussion of the

Baltic States. To reflect this rationale, this chapter is organized in the following way:

- Ethnic Russians.
- Baltic Reaction to discrimination charges.
- European and international organizations.

B. ETHNIC RUSSIANS

Currently, the status of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the Baltics, depending upon the side to which you speak, is debateable. The Russians, especially in the states of Estonia and Latvia, have been decrying that social injustices are occurring routinely, and it has angered and frightened large segments of this population. It would be instructive to explore these grievances and consider the relevance of this ethnic Russian population by discussing: (1) their demographic significance, (2) the current citizenship and voting requirements, and (3) the exact nature of the human rights violations, that they contend, exist.

1. Demographic Significance

The human rights issue has its roots firmly grounded in the abuses of Russification foisted upon the Baltic States by Joseph Stalin. Massive numbers of the indigenous population were systematically deported and executed while others fled for their lives. Before 1940, ethnic Estonians constituted nearly 90% of the population.¹² Since that time ethnic Russians and other Russian speakers have grown to represent nearly 40% of the total

population. In Latvia, during the same time frame, ethnic Latvians accounted initially for roughly 88% of the population, but ethnic Russians and other Russian speakers now account for nearly 50%. Although Lithuania retained a large portion of its ethnic base, Russian speakers who arrived later have come to dominate large areas of the country.¹³

Whether one would describe this process as ethnic cleansing on a grand scale, or “slow cultural genocide”, the occupation of the Baltics, and the resultant suppression of local languages and permanent presence of Soviet troops, all contributed to the immediate goal of creating a Russian majority and a long term aim of the total destruction of the Baltic State’s cultures and languages.¹⁴

What one finds today is a significant ethnic Russian population. Statistics based on 1990 ethnic composition show that Estonians represent roughly 65% of the population while ethnic Russians account for 28% with Russian speakers of other ethnic groups making up the difference. Ethnic Latvians number 54% of the total population and Russians follow close behind with 33%. Other Russian speakers and ethnic groups make up the rest. Lithuania is the only Baltic State that finds its indigenous ethnic population retains a clear majority. Ethnic Lithuanians amount to 80% of the total population with ethnic Russians numbering only 8.6%. Poles and Byelorussians make up the rest.¹⁵

The Baltic States must contend with a large ethnic Russian population. Denying citizenship to Baltic Russians will not make them disappear, and non-citizens could and have made their existence an awkward problem by turning to Moscow for help. Today, they are faced with numerous hardships. In all three countries naturalization is being made as difficult as possible, even for the many Russians who voted for Baltic independence.¹⁶

2. Citizenship And Voting

Other than the discrimination that is allegedly taking place in some corners of Baltic society, the biggest single injustice that Ethnic Russians and the Russian government have complained about is the manner in which the citizenship and voting requirements have violated their human rights.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic States rushed to reassert their cultural dominance by writing citizenship laws that require a residency requirement (ten years in Lithuania, 16 in Latvia, and three in Estonia) and a language test which, it is anticipated, most Russia speakers will have a hard time passing. Supposedly, non-citizens, that are the result of these laws, will not be evicted, but neither can they vote, serve in government, or as in Estonia and Latvia, claim minority rights. Additionally, Estonia held an election in the fall of 1992 in which over a third of the inhabitants could not vote because they did not qualify as citizens. Latvia prevents non-citizens from owning property.¹⁷

These citizenship laws have drawn attention from many different quarters and are viewed as an issue that is highly problematic.¹⁸ If ways can be found to resolve these questions of citizenship without violating human rights of not only ethnic Russians, but other non-citizens as well, the Baltics States entry into Europe will be faster and easier than that of the other new countries.¹⁹

Theoretically, the question of human rights and citizenship was discussed by Imants Liegis, a prominent Baltic citizen, where he postulated these are two distinct issues in which decisions about citizenship should not be confused with questions of human rights. Human rights in the European context, governed by the European Convention on Human Rights and its protocols, embraces human rights issues as: the right to life; prohibitions against torture or inhuman punishment; the right to a fair hearing; freedom of thought and religion and so on. The rights “shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race,... language,... national or social origin,” etc. But, he continues, what about Russia’s charges of “discrimination”? The question of becoming a citizen of a country is not a right covered by the European convention. To receive citizenship is a privilege, not a right. Certain rights emanate from this privilege and along with these, responsibilities. Is it therefore “discrimination” to exclude from automatic citizenship those who migrated, in the case of Latvia, as a result of

the Soviet Union's colonialist policies during illegal occupation? Liegis believed not.²⁰

Given this justification for citizenship requirements, it is important to note that his opinion is representative of only one side of the issue. When discussing citizenship, former Latvian Foreign Minister Javis Jurkans noted that serious foreign policy problems in the East and West could result if the citizenship problem is not resolved in favor of the majority of residents. Jurkans believes that progress can be made only if normal relations are established between native and ethnic populations.²¹

The Estonian Foreign Affairs Minister, Trivimi Velliste, emphasized part of the citizenship debate wrestled with the vagueness of concepts such as human rights and political rights. He believes they are different things. Velliste stated that human rights were being fully observed in Estonia and political rights were addressed in, what he considers, a truly democratic constitution.²²

Even with these conciliatory responses to the citizenship issue, all three Baltic States remain resolute on the point concerning non-citizens satisfying the language requirement. Estonia's Prime Minister Mart Laar reflected the Baltic resolve on this issue when he said no arbitrariness is permissible. Those who are required to take an examination should be informed about these requirements.²³ Fortunately, Laar also promised to guarantee non-citizens equal rights and said the Estonian government was

prepared to automatically grant citizenship without any language requirement for Russians who had applied for it by 1990. "According to law, non-Estonians may now vote in next year's local elections. Estonia is the first nation in Europe to try this," Laar said.²⁴

Despite all the tough talk regarding satisfaction of all citizenship requirements before ethnic Russians or other minorities can officially become citizens, the rhetoric is tempered a bit by what Estonian President Meri describes as a question of honor. He stressed that people in Estonia, irrespective of nationality, language, and creed are guaranteed the recognized human rights.²⁵

3. Discrimination/Human Rights Violations

The clamor over human rights violations of ethnic Russians has created stormy seas on both the Russian and Baltic diplomatic and political fronts. Diplomats and legislators from both sides have sought to understand the dynamics of the problem and resolve all outstanding grievances and issues associated with it. The intensity of emotion with which the predicament of ethnic Russians can be viewed ultimately resulted in Yeltsin suspending the withdrawal of all troops from the Baltics pending satisfaction of human rights guarantees.

Ethnic Russians are angered and frightened by what many of them consider the dire turn of events regarding the Soviet Union's collapse

and look to the future with a sense of foreboding. Russians, once servants of the empire, are now a minority, and complaining about it bitterly.²⁶

Specifically, their fears and concerns revolve around the issues of citizenship. Many are fearful that their jobs and promotions depend upon mastering the state language. To many, the expense of mastering the new language may be prohibitive. Others, such as retired military officers, are concerned that they will be evicted from their apartments which, in many cases, were owned by the Soviet army, but have now transferred ownership to the various Baltic States. In Estonia, ethnic Russians cannot own land for the foreseeable future, and they are prohibited from voting in national elections until they satisfy the stringent citizenship requirements.²⁷

Many ethnic Russians are adamant about the role they have played in shaping the Baltic States. Vladamir Chuikin, a non-Estonian who is chairman of the Narva City Council said, "The intent of these laws is clear: to frighten the Russian-speaking population and push it out of Estonia. Why should I answer for Stalin and the Soviet Union and whatever happened here? Many Estonians served the regime, and don't they bear any responsibility? We helped create wealth here, so shouldn't we share in it?"²⁸

Russian diplomat Boris Tsepov, involved in talks over discrimination issues in the Baltics, reflected the anger and uncertainty of the Russian residents living in Baltic countries when he said, "It is almost ethnic cleansing, what they are doing." He said ethnic Russians were being hounded

out of jobs and housing. "Patriotism has crossed over into militant nationalism."²⁹

Ethnic Russians, accustomed for so many years to feeling at home everywhere, now believe they have been wronged. It is characteristic for Russians to identify themselves with their country as do other peoples in countries throughout the world. Now, in the Baltics, they see the loss of power and influence they once had in the region, as well as the shrinking military presence, and they perceive this as detrimental to Russia. Therefore, they feel it is harmful to them as well.³⁰ Another Russian, describing the issue as a psychological problem said, "We were used to being elder brothers, and now we have to get used to being a national minority."³¹

C. BALTIC REACTION TO DISCRIMINATION CHARGES

Contrary to the Russian side, the Baltic States have reacted quite differently to charges of human rights violations. They have defended their state sovereignty and have, at times, been quite astonished by the volume of accusations and the escalation of the debate. To better understand the Baltic position this section will investigate, (1) the validity of the charges and grievances, (2) the perspective of the Baltic citizen, and (3) the Baltic concern over the Russian response.

1. Validity Of Charges/Grievances

The Baltic States do not deny that, to a certain degree, discrimination is occurring, but government leaders have tried to reassure

the Russian government that they are doing their utmost to protect the human rights of ethnic Russians and encouraging their assimilation into Baltic life and culture.

Lithuania is a good example of these policies. The problem of ethnic diversity is much less intense in Lithuania because its non-Lithuanian population is much smaller.³² Even so, Lithuania's citizenship law allowed virtually all residents to receive citizenship if they applied by November 3, 1991.

Estonian President Meri, on a state visit to Finland, was asked about punishing non-Estonians currently living in Estonia for events from the past. Meri said the issue was not one of punishment and that the Soviets were ruthless to Russians and Estonians alike. He felt it would be a big mistake to view Russian families as enemies, and they were victims just like Estonians.³³

As if these conciliatory remarks were not enough, in a meeting between Russian and Latvian parliamentarians, the Russian delegates agreed that the recent complaints about discrimination of the military officers, allegedly taking place in Latvia, had no leg to stand on.³⁴

The Baltic States believe their naturalization process, including a language requirement, is a reasonably liberal response. The Estonian's residency requirement of three years is unusually liberal when compared to a five year period in the United States.³⁵

The validity of charges on human rights violations can be further contested because little evidence exists of such abuses, and some of the new laws covering citizenship are as yet incomplete. Although the potential for abuse is certainly there, Estonian and Latvian officials say no abuse is intended and none will be allowed.³⁶

2. Perspective Of The Baltic Citizen

As enlightened as the governments of the Baltic States might be, failing to mention the feelings of the common Baltic citizen toward their non-citizen neighbors would be neglecting a large part of the discrimination issue.

Diplomats from Latvia and Estonia concede that decades of Soviet domination have left bitter emotions toward Russians, particularly former military officers.³⁷

Estonians and Latvians consider most of the Russians as occupiers that were brought in large numbers to the illegally annexed countries to Russify their language and destroy their culture. Russian became the operating language. Many leading citizens were deported, or executed, and thousands of others were deported or escaped.³⁸

Mart Rannut, the head of Estonia's National language Board, expressed his contempt when he said "after what the Soviets did to us, for us to ask Russians to learn a little language as the cost of citizenship seems not too big a price to ask." "We're not jailing them, deporting them, or depriving them of housing."³⁹

President Meri put it most eloquently when he spoke of the psychological damage done to all subjects of the former Soviet empire and of how, as in "Sleeping Beauty," suppressed countries have awakened years later with all their pre-war passions and attitudes intact. In Estonia, he said, the result is a legal and emotional effort to revive the country frozen in 1940. "But there is no hatred." "There is only the fear of being extinguished on your own soil."⁴⁰

3. Concern Over Russian Response

As the debate between Russia and the Baltics has progressed, the Baltic leadership has become very concerned over the foreign policy initiatives Moscow might take to address the allegations of human rights abuses. Baltic leaders are painfully aware that the whole course of events largely depends on Russia's domestic and foreign policy, its understanding of its interests, and the ability to defend them. In particular the role and behavior of the Russian diaspora in the near and remote foreign countries are directly influenced by the progress or curtailment of reforms in Russia and by the successes or failure of the negotiating process.⁴¹

Nowhere is this concern more apparent than with the status of troop withdrawal from Baltic soil. Diplomats from both sides have met repeatedly, but only Lithuania has met with any success in reaching an accord with the Russians on a definitive plan for the departure of Russian troops by the end of 1993.⁴² Latvia and Estonia, to date, have been unable to agree in

principle on a time table regarding troop withdrawal and have steadfastly refused to make significant concessions regarding citizenship laws.

The issue of human rights and the alleged abuse perpetrated against ethnic Russians, and Russian troops, prompted President Yeltsin, on 29 October 1992, to suspend withdrawal altogether. The linkage of troop withdrawal to the problem of alleged human rights abuses, an issue that the Baltic countries believe has been exaggerated beyond reason, is, they feel, not within the purview of Russian foreign policy. It has infuriated and worried Baltic leadership. They view the continuing presence of Russian troops on their territories as the greatest single threat to their security and independence.⁴³

Russian proposals, offering withdrawal of troops by 1994 on the condition that the three Baltic States guarantee the rights of resident Russians and soldiers while abandoning any territorial claims on Russia, have been rejected. The Baltic leaders argue that Russia is raising the human rights issues only to sustain its hegemony over the region and delay the withdrawal of its forces.⁴⁴

The fear over a resurgent Russian military and Russian domination is considerable. Although unspoken, the idea that independence, wrested from the Soviet collapse, may be no longer than the 20 years of sovereignty wrested from the chaos of the first World War does not seem unthinkable.⁴⁵

If the pace of withdrawals by occupation forces, and Russia's intentions for their deployment, are not enough for concern, the Baltic States are also worried about Russia's policies toward the Baltic economies.

There are those in leadership positions that consider the economic vulnerability of the Baltics just as significant an issue. They depend almost entirely on the Russian market and Russian supplies. If Russia were to demand high prices for goods, the fragile Baltic economies would collapse. The fundamentalist Lithuanian government sees economic issues as an attempt to possibly draw the former republics back into some form of confederation.⁴⁶

Juri Kahn, the Estonian Ambassador to Russia, tried to view things in a more positive light by saying there was not a need for serious fears that economic sanctions, imposed because of the alleged human rights violations, would be terribly difficult as long as Western governments supported their policies.⁴⁷

Finally, there is the question of Russia's economy. By virtue of the Baltics being in the Ruble Zone (save Estonia's Kroon), Russia is the key to Baltic economic stabilization. To a large extent, the near-term prospects of the Baltic States depend on the success of economic stabilization in Russia.⁴⁸

There is cause for concern over the events taking place in the Baltic States. Social, economic, and military worries have placed enormous burdens upon the Yeltsin government. The pressure these concerns are

generating is helping to shape Russian foreign policy, including its policies toward the Baltic States. The Baltic leadership, in turn, are most certainly watching the developing events in Russia and contemplating their own interests within the broader context of Russian interests.

D. EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

A discussion of the events taking place in the Baltic countries, with respect to the human rights issues, would not be complete without including the role that individual organizations are playing in resolving this sensitive issue. The paper will briefly explore: (1) Baltic requests for independent review, and (2) the response to these Baltic overtures.

1. Baltic Request For Independent Review

As the topic of human rights violations has grown, Baltic leaders have increasingly sought the council, advice, and endorsement of various European and International bodies. They have done so hoping to deflect the mounting criticism from some corners (especially the Russian corner) as well as to seek security arrangements that may possibly become necessary should relations begin to decay with the Russians and events turn increasingly hostile. If, in the process of seeking such security arrangements, a clear message is sent to the Russian government regarding European resolve for stability and security in the area, the Baltic leadership will have achieved their objective.

Baltic attempts to resolve both human rights issues and Russian troop withdrawal have quite naturally led them to the United Nations. The three Baltic countries petitioned the 92nd U. N. General Assembly in the form of a draft resolution, for their help in persuading Russia to immediately remove its troops. Although this resolution was eventually adopted, such a resolution from the U. N. could not be enforced. Even so, the Baltic representatives hoped to attract enough attention to pressure Russia into an agreement.⁴⁹

The issue has also been addressed at a conference of the newly established Baltic Sea Council where the Lithuanian Foreign Minister suggested that Vilnius be the home of a minority rights office.⁵⁰

NATO has also been a target for the Baltic lobbyists. In an address while visiting Brussels, V. Landsbergis, Chairman of the Lithuanian Supreme Council frequently referred to the threats and pressure to which Lithuania was being subjected and called for NATO, or the WEU, to participate in supervising troop withdrawal. He did not rule out the possibility of military intervention involving Russian troops in the Baltics.⁵¹

In other discussions with NATO officials, Andrejs Krastinsh, the Latvian Supreme Council's deputy chairman expressed the wish of the Latvian government that European observers would come to Latvia and give their report on the actual military-political situation in Latvia.⁵²

2. Response To Baltic Overtures

The concerted effort of Baltic diplomats did indeed focus world attention on the activities transpiring in their countries and elicited responses from a number of different organizations expressing concern for European security and regional stability.

On a visit to Estonia, Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt expressed confidence that Estonia would be able to resolve the Russian question.⁵³

A meeting discussing stability in the Baltic region, organized by the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA), resulted in recommendations that the Baltic States stress the need to use external security structures. The NAA expressed the sentiment that it regards the Baltic States as “a zone of danger which is an international problem.”⁵⁴

Secretary General of the European Council , Catherine Talumiere, held a press conference in which she found valid points on both sides of the human rights issue, but also stressed that Russia should withdraw its troops from these countries without delay. She urged that Russian problems linked with troop withdrawal not be considered, and recommended that the evolving conditions not be dramatized by escalatory language or actions..⁵⁵

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) has also expressed its concern and support for events developing in the Baltic

region. The leaders of the Baltic States considered the CSCE support so valuable that the draft resolution submitted to the U. N. to ensure the peaceful withdrawal of Russian forces noted the support and the efforts of participants to the CSCE.⁵⁶

Acting on the draft resolution, the U.N. passed the request on 25 November 1992. It called for the quick withdrawal of the roughly 70-80,000 troops left in the Baltics, and it also required Russia to negotiate agreements between Latvia and Estonia in establishing time-tables on the withdrawal. Lithuania had previously negotiated such an agreement.⁵⁷

In its turn, NATO has also responded to the Baltic situation. During a visit of Lithuanian Supreme Council Chairman Landsbergis, NATO Secretary General Woerner hastened to say the NATO countries are interested not only in Lithuanian security, but also in protecting it from outside pressure and interference.⁵⁸

During a show of support by eight visiting NATO ships to Latvia, Latvian Supreme Council Deputy Chairman Andrejs Krastins, expressed the hope that the NATO Naval Forces would promote the withdrawal of Russian forces. The Commander of the NATO Navy, Mr. Hildesley, added that he considered the presence of Russian warships in Latvia as a source of instability, and that the government of Great Britain, in concert with the governments of the other NATO states, agrees with Latvian demands and finds them justified.⁵⁹

In what has probably been the definitive NATO statement to date, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee General Vigleik Eide, on a visit to Estonia, considered immediate Russian troop withdrawal the basis for normal relations with Russia. He also maintained that Estonia should ensure the rights of Russian troops currently stationed there, to ease the tension, and that finding economic and political agreement was easier than fighting the Russian Army. The general commented on the problems ethnic minorities have caused in contemporary Europe, but thought Estonia's sovereignty must be respected and protected.⁶⁰ European security and stability depend upon the Baltic States and Russia arriving at a mutually satisfactory solution to this dilemma.

III. RUSSIAN POSITION

A. BACKGROUND

From the Russian perspective, the problem of minority rights in the Baltics is an interesting combination of factors that have resulted in the Yeltsin government taking a conservative stand on this contentious, divisive issue and fanning the flames of discontent on both sides.

Although not immediately apparent, after the August 1991 coup, minority rights have increasingly become a more important priority of both conservatives and liberals in the Russian government. Conservatives have charged that Yeltsin's handling of foreign affairs has repeatedly downplayed the importance of relations with other former Soviet republics, as well as the plight of Russian minorities, and that Yeltsin has devoted an inordinate amount of resources and time to courting the West for economic favors and concessions.⁶¹

The situation in the Baltics is complicated by the Baltic States' insistence upon immediate withdrawal of all Russian forces stationed on Baltic soil. At first glance, the questions of troop withdrawal, on the one hand, and of discrimination against minorities, on the other, appear completely dissimilar. However, this chapter will show how the Russian

response regarding discrimination against Russian speakers is linked to not only the question of troop withdrawal, but other issues as well that, in total, comprise the various factors that must be considered in contemplating the policy options at the Russian government's disposal.

This chapter will examine the following areas:

- The Government's Response To Alleged Discrimination.
- Current Policy Considerations.
- Security Implications/Regional Stability.

B. GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO ALLEGED DISCRIMINATION

In order to understand why Russia is considering certain policy options it would be instructive to first study how the political factions in Russia view the matter of human rights violations and discrimination of ethnic Russians in the Baltics and with what concern. Therefore, the following topics will be covered: (1) how and why the issue is gaining momentum, (2) Russia's views on protecting ethnic Russians in the Baltic countries, (3) the linkage question, and (4) the divisive nature of the problem in the Russian government.

1. Issue Gaining Momentum

The current debate over minority rights and discrimination against Russian speakers in the Baltics started to gain momentum around the middle of 1992, and it has continued unabated since that time.

The Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, believes that the priority of Russian foreign policy is to develop good relations with Russia's

new neighbors, the former republics of the Soviet empire. Bad relations with the former republics could hurt Russia by making it less attractive to both foreign aid and investment. Without good relations with the former Soviet republics, there is the risk that disputes could lead to a sharp increase in tension and instability.⁶²

Although interested in good relations with the republics, Kozyrev is primarily concerned about Russia remaining an attractive recipient of foreign aid. Kozyrev's heavy emphasis on the correlation between successful foreign policy and fiscal health implied that Russia will concentrate its diplomatic efforts on countries that can help it solve its own domestic problems.⁶³

Hence, much attention was paid to courting the West for such economic favors while neglecting to notice the problems developing with their Baltic neighbors. By the time the foreign ministry started taking notice of the complaints about rights violations, predominately conservative elements within the executive and legislative branches of the government, and the military, had seized upon the issue and were exploiting it for political gain.

Even though the issue of minority rights had started to surface as early as March of 1992, the main issue of linkage to Russian troop withdrawal was yet to come. The Baltic States have been pressing, and continue to press, the Russian government for complete troop withdrawal by

repeatedly demanding schedules. It seems more than coincidental that as the demands for troop withdrawal have become more strident, the accusations of discrimination against ethnic Russian minorities, including acting and retired Russian military, have become more frequent. One possible reason for the recent accusations about human rights violations has been random acts of violence perpetrated primarily by anonymous individuals against Russian military personnel and installations. Additionally, ethnic Russians living in the various Baltic States have complained that the citizenship and voting requirements of the three governments are discriminatory.

2. Protecting Ethnic Russians

In late February 1992, Kozyrev told "Novosti" that Russia respected the sovereignty of CIS states, but would strictly defend its own interests, including protection of Russians and Russian-speakers, in other CIS states. Some feel that Kozyrev's statement indicates that Russia considers itself to have a considerable mandate in the CIS, and that it believes it possesses the right to intervene in the internal affairs of other states.⁶⁴

Kozyrev, speaking at a conference of the Baltic Sea Council, criticized the Baltic States for failing to respect the human rights of Russian speakers. He suggested that the council appoint a trouble shooter on minority rights.⁶⁵

As the situation has developed, the perception of the Russian government about Baltic discriminatory practices was reflected in the

inflammatory rhetoric of both Kozyrev and State Counselor for political affairs Sergei B. Stankevich. Kozyrev was quoted as saying that Russia "will be protecting the rights of Russians in other states of the commonwealth; this gets top priority. We shall protect their rights firmly and we will be using forceful methods if needed." Stankevich expressed great concern about the fate of ethnic Russians in the republics, stressing that Russia's interest in these people did not constitute interference in another state's internal affairs.⁶⁶

Russia has also indicated its anger at the Baltics, for civil rights violations, by protesting the various voting and citizenship laws. During the month of April 1992, Russia protested against the Estonian citizenship laws and criticized the Latvian language law, expressing dissatisfaction that the Russian language now had the same status as any other foreign language in Latvia.⁶⁷

Withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics has been an "on and off again" operation that has sorely tested the patience of the Baltic governments, but the Yeltsin government has become increasingly critical of the Baltic States and their treatment of Russian servicemen. The Russian Foreign Ministry joined with the Defense Ministry in protesting against the treatment of Russian troops serving in the Baltic States. The statement read in part that "Russia does not intend to stand idly by in the face of insulting treatment of Russian troops and will defend their interests in the most

decisive manner.” It added that provocative statements were hindering the progress of troop withdrawal talks. This statement was interesting for two reasons. First, it suggested that the two ministries are coordinating policy on the Baltic issues. Secondly, it was the first real hint of linkage between the minorities question and troop withdrawal.⁶⁸

In a similar vein, Stankevich criticized Russian foreign policy for its failure to stand up for the rights of the Russian population in other countries. He accused four states, of which two were Estonia and Latvia, of oppressing their Russian minorities and threatened to use force to protect them. Stankevich noted that Russia would soon reemerge as a power capable of protecting its people.⁶⁹

By September 1992 the situation was deteriorating quickly. Russia’s delegation to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly warned Estonia and Latvia, on 29 September 1992, against pursuing a policy of “ethnic cleansing.” Sergei Yastrzhembsky said his government was concerned about policies toward non-Balts in Estonia and Latvia that could lead these two states “to slide down the slope to the practice of ethnic cleansing.”⁷⁰

3. Linkage Question

In August 1992, Foreign Minister Kozyrev linked troop withdrawal in the Baltics to the issue of discrimination of ethnic Russians. In all, troop withdrawal was linked to nine specific points. Two of them pertained directly to the minorities issue. Point seven stated that the Baltics

must guarantee social benefits and human rights for retired Soviet Officers and their families residing in the Baltic States. Point eight required the Baltic States to alter laws that infringed upon the political and economic rights of the Russian speaking populations.⁷¹

President Yeltsin stated that no troop withdrawal agreements would be signed with Estonia and Latvia until they guaranteed more extensive “minority rights” for Russians. Yeltsin accused both states of gross violations of the rights of their Russian minorities and urged both states to adopt minority legislation similar to that of Lithuania.⁷²

Finally, on 29 October 1992, Yeltsin issued a directive to suspend withdrawal of Russian troops because of alleged human rights violations suffered by Russians in the Baltics. This new Russian position appeared to be the first manifestation of the tougher foreign policy Yeltsin had called for in a speech to the Foreign Ministry on 27 October 1992.⁷³ The issue of linking troop withdrawals from the Baltic States to alleged violations of the minority rights of ethnic Russians was now a reality and not merely a threat.

4. Divisive Concern

Clearly, the evidence of a frustrated and embattled Yeltsin government had revealed itself as the months passed by, and the crisis grew proportionately. Conservative factions in the government had been very critical of the government’s failure to improve bilateral relations with the former republics and specifically its resolve in addressing the rights of

Russian minorities. An examination of their position might help in understanding Russia's current policy dilemma concerning its Baltic neighbors.

As the debate developed before and during the Sixth Congress of People's Deputies, the question of Russia's policy toward CIS states had become a very visible part of a larger and more emotional debate over whether the collapse of the Soviet Union was necessary, avoidable, or indeed, reversible. Perhaps the most emotional and dangerous aspect of this debate is the question of protecting the rights of Russians outside the Russian Federation.⁷⁴

The issue of defending the rights of Russians living outside the Russian state has become particularly dangerous because both conservatives and reformers alike find themselves on the same side of the fence. Few would argue against the protection of ethnic Russians and a guarantee for their individual rights. The matter has become a measure of "patriotism" for politicians eager to demonstrate their willingness to defend fellow countrymen, by force if necessary. But the declarations to provide such guarantees sound like incitements to interfere in the internal affairs of other states.⁷⁵

The conservative position is exemplified by Russian Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi, who told a rally that the republic "existed, exists, and must exist."⁷⁶ Other conservative elements have continued to

press the Yeltsin government to act decisively on the issue of discrimination and minority rights.

The Supreme Soviet, acting on a proposal by chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov, started to discuss the situation in the three Baltic States paying special attention to the real and potential discrimination against Russians and other Slavs in the laws of the Baltic States. Vladimir Podoprigora, the chairman of the Commission on Questions of Interrepublican Affairs, claimed that the atmosphere was "conducive to intolerance and aggressive nationalism." The parliament, in a similar debate passed a resolution threatening action against Estonia in response to alleged "human rights violations." In addition, the Supreme Soviet also adopted a statement on "Human Rights in the Baltic States" saying it "resolutely repudiated the inclusion in the legislative acts of the Baltic States of articles that make discrimination on grounds of nationality the norm and that lead to an increase in social and political tension and have a negative influence on regional stability."⁷⁷

As the debate about Russia's handling of affairs with former republics and the minority question intensified, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev, and his moderate policies, came under increasingly harsh criticism from conservative quarters, especially by State Counselor Stankevich. Kozyrev has maintained that the best way to protect the rights of ethnic Russians is to establish good relations with their host states and not by

pressure or force. He describes those who adhere to such thinking as belonging to the “party of war” and rejects opponents’ arguments that Russia can develop democracy at home while practicing “strong arm” tactics with its neighbors.⁷⁸

On the other hand, Stankevich endorsed a plan announced by Ruslan Khasbulatov, the Speaker of the Russian Parliament, to create a separate ministry to handle Russia’s affairs with the CIS. Stankevich reportedly believes that he is the most likely candidate to head the new ministry and has advocated transferring control over CIS affairs from the Foreign Ministry to the new organ. Kozyrev, of course, opposes the idea, saying that the Foreign Ministry is in the process of establishing its own branch concerned with CIS affairs. Apart from the apparent political power struggle between these two figures, Stankevich is truly more conservative than Kozyrev, and he has chastised Kozyrev for handling the crisis in a weak manner. Should Stankevich and other conservative elements gain control of Foreign Affairs, it is quite likely that the West might see increasingly active defense of ethnic Russians and less cooperation with Western countries.⁷⁹

With both conservatives and moderates maneuvering to gain political advantage, and the question of minority rights as one centerpiece issue, consideration must be given to Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his position on this very sensitive problem.

Even though Boris Yeltsin issued a proclamation on the 29th of October 1992 suspending all troop withdrawal from the Baltics and linking withdrawal with the question of minority rights, Yeltsin's public pronouncement may not necessarily reflect his private position, but rather one of political necessity. Yeltsin's overarching concern is the transformation of a totalitarian state with a command economy into an enlightened, pluralistic, democratic, capitalist oriented society. The job is enormous, and there is little doubt that Yeltsin must make certain concessions to assure both the country's survival as well as his own political survival.

Yeltsin's decision to suspend withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic States may, on the surface, reflect a tougher stand toward the Baltics by the Russian government, but it is entirely possible that he is attempting to mollify Russian nationalists who have charged his government with neglecting the fate of ethnic Russians and minorities on the former empire's periphery. Although the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS said that the main reason for Yeltsin's decision to order the suspension was discrimination against Russian speakers, it appears as though Yeltsin is trying to balance the demands of vocal nationalists by adopting some of their rhetoric while protecting the people and policies he needs to keep domestic reform moving ahead.⁸⁰

Yeltsin has resisted calls for the ouster of Andrei Kozyrev as Foreign Minister, and for all his tough talk on the Baltics he is allowing the withdrawal of troops to quietly continue.

Indeed, several diplomatic overtures seem to point in this direction. After the 29 October 1992 announcement suspending troop withdrawal, Andrei Kozyrev performed some backpedaling, saying that the withdrawal should continue, but that the suspension was merely a strategy meant to streamline the pull-out. The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Vitaly Churkin, said that Russia merely wanted to discuss discrimination against ethnic Russians, and that there was no reason for anyone to get overly excited.⁸¹ Additionally, Churkin advised Estonia to disregard the order by Yeltsin and made three points: first, Yeltsin's decree did not change the process of troop withdrawal; second, the decree was part of an internal working document not intended for public dissemination; and third, Russia would not link troop withdrawals to alleged "human rights issues."⁸²

President Yeltsin attempted to alleviate the problem in a press conference on 5 November 1992 when he said that the decision to suspend troop withdrawals from the Baltics had been made because the Defense Ministry had overstrained the process by stationing some units in open fields. Yeltsin said that Lithuania's schedule for withdrawals would be followed, and a commission had been formed to discuss schedules with Latvia and Estonia. Rights of Russian-speaking minorities would not be linked to the process.⁸³

It appears that each move in this game of chess, regarding human rights in the Baltic region, is being made very cautiously. The political realities are such that President Yeltsin is in no position to ignore demands for action from his conservative opponents. The stakes appear to be not only the fate of ethnic Russians, or the pace of troop withdrawals from the Baltics, but the political survival of President Yeltsin and his ministers and the survival of the democratic and economic reforms the Yeltsin government is trying to accomplish.

C. CURRENT POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

With the human rights question in the Baltics consuming more and more time, diplomatic energy has shifted to not only negotiating a settlement, but exploring other options the Russian government has at its disposal to convince the Baltic States that what Russia considers in its best interests would also be in the best interests of the Baltic region. This section will consider these options which include: (1) linkage with troop withdrawal and intervention, (2) sanctions that could be applied, and (3) using European and international organizations to help settle the dispute.

1. Linkage With Troop Withdrawal

As demonstrated in the previous section, the Russian government, for various reasons, considers the minorities issue in the Baltics to be a highly charged one, fraught with political and diplomatic dilemmas. The Yeltsin government has not been completely successful in dealing with

the crisis and, on occasion, there have been conflicting signals regarding Russia's policy with respect to this issue and the various options it believes it has at its disposal.

Whatever option the Yeltsin government elects to pursue, the desired result is the elimination of discriminatory behavior on the part of the Baltic States toward Russian minorities. For the Yeltsin government, this would primarily take the form of legislative initiatives and executive decrees that would modify, or eliminate, current voting and citizenship laws which are targets of Russian criticism. Conservative elements within the executive and legislative branches of the government, and the military, favor adoption of harsher policies designed to maintain Russian hegemony in the Baltic region. Other issues regard visa and immigration restrictions and ownership of real estate. As can well be imagined, the Baltic States are highly critical of what they consider Russian meddling in their internal affairs.

The Russians have several policy alternatives at their disposal. Two of the more prominent options have already been discussed: linkage with troop withdrawal, and possible intervention if the Yeltsin government should feel boxed in with no other alternatives. Currently, the inflammatory remarks made by Stankevich and the tough talk of Kozyrev, pertaining to the defense of Russian interests and Russian speakers, seem to be nothing more than "saber rattling." Even Yeltsin's decree linking troop withdrawal with human rights issues seems to be less than serious.

2. Sanctions

One possibility that may bring a resolution to the crisis, or, on the other hand, cause a total “meltdown” of all negotiations, is the imposition of Russian sanctions on the Baltic States. Sergei Stankevich called for economic sanctions to be imposed on the Baltic States if they continued to engage in discriminatory practices.⁸⁴ A short time later, Stankevich again expressed concern over the minorities question, and called for sanctions against Estonia and Latvia where, he asserted, millions of Russians had been denied basic rights.⁸⁵

Stankevich, however, is not the only one pressing his demands for sanctions. The Russian parliament passed a resolution threatening action against Estonia for “human rights violations.” The members of parliament then called upon the government to impose sanctions against Estonia if the discrimination did not stop.⁸⁶

In September 1992, sanctions were still the topic of discussion when acting Russian Prime Minister Gaidar said the question of Sanctions against the Baltics had yet to be resolved.⁸⁷

Sergei Zotov, chief Russian negotiator for talks on troop withdrawals from Latvia, said that Latvia was pursuing an “apartheid policy” toward nearly half its population-the Russians and other Slavs. He warned that Russia could turn off Latvia’s gas pipeline and reduce the supply of industrial raw materials. Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister, Churkin,

raised the possibility of imposing economic sanctions against Latvia and Estonia if human rights violations did not cease.⁸⁸

For all the talk, no sanctions have been directed against the Baltic States to date. But, as the record indicates, the thought has certainly crossed Russian minds in the past, such as Gorbachev's economic blockade of Lithuania. Presently, it remains to be seen how far the Russians can be pushed before sanctions shift from being a possibility to a reality.

3. European/International Organizations

Another option the Russian government has at its disposal, and has used to some degree, is international organizations. The Russians have predominantly used these organizations to present their case for ethnic rights violations in the Baltics, but they have not met with a great deal of success.

In March 1992, Russia was a signatory in establishing the Baltic Sea Council. On March 5th, while addressing the members of the newly formed council, Foreign Minister Kozyrev criticized the Baltic States for failing to "respect the human rights of Russian-speakers" and asked the council to appoint a trouble-shooter on minority rights. Although other foreign ministers pointed out that such a function would be duplicating the work of the CSCE, this represented one of the first occasions that any Russian representative had taken the minorities issue to an independent European organization.⁸⁹

Again, the Russians tried taking their case to an international organization when the Russian delegation, at the CSCE foreign ministers meeting in Helsinki, circulated a statement protesting Estonia's new citizenship law. The statement read, in part, that Russia "reserves the right to use relevant international mechanisms to draw the world's attention to the human rights situation in Estonia following the law on citizenship."⁹⁰

Sergei Zotov, head of the delegation holding talks with Latvia, told a group of high level officials in Moscow that the Russian Supreme Soviet must not delay ratification of the Latvian-Russian treaty endorsed by President Yeltsin on 13 January 1992. Zotov argued that once the treaty was ratified, Russia could ask the CSCE to examine the human rights aspects of certain Latvian laws.⁹¹

Even though Russian delegates were trying their best to get the other foreign ministers of the CSCE to see things their way on the minorities issue in the Baltics, most of the CSCE governments had other ideas about the pace of Russian troop withdrawals. During proceedings at Helsinki the Latvian Supreme Council Chairman, Anatolijs Gorbunovs, pointed out the instability resulting from the presence of Russian troops in Latvia. As a result, it became not only a topic of discussion, but was referred to in the summit's final document.⁹²

The Russian Parliament took a different approach and appealed to the UN. The parliament passed a resolution threatening action against

Estonia for “human rights violations.” The resolution also appealed to the UN to raise the issue during the current session of the General Assembly.⁹³

Despite Russia’s attempts in both the UN and the CSCE to gather world support for alleged violations of human rights in the Baltics, it suffered two major setbacks. First, Representatives of the Federation of Ethnic Communities of Europe found little in the way of ethnic discrimination during a trip they made to Lithuania. Secondly, when Western diplomats visited Latvia and found no evidence of “human rights violations”, the US embassy press attache, James Kenny, said that as far as he was aware, the Baltic States were observing human rights. He noted that Russia had failed to provide factual information to back up its claim of human rights violations in response to US queries. The German Ambassador did note, however, that the manner in which Latvian authorities were handling citizenship and language issues was causing some problems.⁹⁴

D. SECURITY IMPLICATIONS/REGIONAL STABILITY

European and international organizations and governments have taken a keen interest in events in the Baltics. For West European nations, regional stability in the Baltic region equates to East European stability, and ultimately, overall European security. To appreciate this kind of reasoning, the paper will discuss : (1) NATO’s position on the Baltic issue, and (2) the impressions of other European and international organizations.

1. NATO

Concerns for regional stability have prompted a number of visits and inspections by NATO officials to evaluate the situation. Sir Brian Kenny, a deputy supreme allied commander of NATO forces in Europe, visited Latvia to discuss the conceptual basis of Latvia's defense.⁹⁵ German Bundestag deputies also concerned about defense issues were very interested in a timetable for the withdrawal of Russian troops.⁹⁶

Juris Dobelis, Latvian parliamentary deputy, reported that during a meeting with NATO officials in March 1992, NATO was interested in the stability of the Baltic States, but could not address itself to matters related to the withdrawal of Russian troops until a formal accord had been reached by Latvia and Russia regarding the pullout.⁹⁷

On 27 April 1992, a seminar organized by the North Atlantic Assembly and the Latvian parliament discussed problems of stability and security in the Baltic region for purposes of allowing NATO to become better acquainted with the situation in the Baltic States.⁹⁸

Toward the end of 1992, NATO was once again actively engaged in the Baltic question. NATO Military Committee Chairman General Vigleik Eide held talks with officers of the Estonian Defense Force. Eide noted that the three Baltic States belonged to NATO's area of interest, because "NATO is interested in maintaining the stability and freedom of European countries."⁹⁹ This was a significant step not only for the Baltics, but also for NATO. It

represented a more determined stand than NATO had previously assumed with the Baltics.

2. Other Organizations

In addition to the limited informational and organizational tempo of NATO's involvement, other organizations and countries have taken a more vigorous stand on the human rights issue and Russia's attempted linkage of that to the withdrawal of its troops. At a meeting of the North Atlantic Assembly the Russian delegation agreed to hold informal talks attended by observers from NATO on arranging a timetable for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic States.¹⁰⁰

While visiting the Baltics French President Mitterrand, speaking before the Lithuanian parliament, told the legislators that the continued presence of Russian troops in the Baltic States was "abnormal and shocking."¹⁰¹

International pressure continued to mount as representatives to the International Crans Montana Forum on European Integration supported the Baltic States' appeal for an early withdrawal of Russian troops. Additionally, Secretary of State James Baker reported on 23 June that Presidents Bush and Yeltsin had discussed the troop withdrawal issue, and that President Bush told Yeltsin that the withdrawal could be achieved more quickly if new recruits were not sent to the Baltic States to replace troops whose tours of duty had ended.¹⁰²

The Group of Seven leading industrial nations issued a statement urging Russia to establish a timetable on the withdrawal of troops from the Baltic States. Correspondingly, a group of Finnish organizations appealed to the CSCE to "make insistent demands for an end to the military occupation of the Baltic States," and the US Senate voted to impose restrictions on aid to Russia after twelve months unless it made significant progress toward withdrawing its troops from the Baltic States.¹⁰³

UN experts on human rights arrived in Latvia, at Latvia's request, to assess the human rights situation in Latvia, especially with regard to Russians and other Slavs,¹⁰⁴ and Erika Bruce, representing NATO, visited Lithuania to make preparations for a seminar on "The Baltic Region in the New Europe."¹⁰⁵

By the end of 1992 this avalanche of international sentiment on the plight of the Baltics had not gone unnoticed by the Russian government. The Commander-in-Chief of CIS forces, Evgenii Shaposhnikov, said that the military withdrawal from the Baltic States should not be pushed because it could have explosive consequences for both Russia and the Baltic States. He criticized appeals by the Baltic governments to NATO and the CSCE about withdrawals, as well as the holding of referenda on the issue.¹⁰⁶

There is ample evidence, as well as little doubt, that regional stability in the Baltics is a vital question to the European community. The issue of human rights for ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers and its

impact upon the question of troop withdrawal is an antagonistic correlation not easily resolved by the two bickering factions. For the Russians economic and political turmoil on the home front makes the withdrawal of Russian troops a problematic decision because of genuine concern for ethnic Russians and the more complex problems that reside beneath the surface of this current issue. In the Baltic States, local citizens and governments continue to make it clear that the "occupiers" are not welcome. If withdrawal becomes a long and tedious process that could potentially take years to accomplish, then at some point during that time there may be an explosive confrontation.

IV. ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL RUSSIAN MOTIVES

A. BACKGROUND

Thus far, the thrust of this paper has been to give consideration to all sides of this current problem regarding the difficult question of ethnic Russians in the Baltic region and the human rights violations they allege have occurred.

But, evidence is beginning to suggest that the issue runs deeper than just the debate over human rights violations or discrimination.

Domestically, politically, economically, and militarily, a great deal is at stake in today's turbulent Russia. There is certainly reason to believe that elements exist within the Yeltsin government, and Russia in general, that are genuinely concerned about the condition of ethnic Russians in the Baltics, but wish to negotiate a peaceful solution to the problem. There are, however, militant and conservative voices that have taken up the cause as a method of advancing other concerns.

These elements, whether they be military or political in nature, have recognized the issue of human rights as a vehicle to achieve other policy objectives, primarily as a pretense to maintaining a Russian presence in the Baltic area.

Therefore, the balance of this paper will examine the Russian position and possible foreign policy decisions they might make within the broader context of their intent with respect to the current developing Baltic dilemma, and discuss the link between the human rights issue, on one hand, and the possible objectives of the Russians, on the other.

To accomplish this task, this chapter will proceed in the following manner:

- Immediate Russian Concerns.
- Strategic Concerns.
- Human Rights Violations: Pretense For Ambition?

B. IMMEDIATE RUSSIAN CONCERNS

The issue of human rights violations, in keeping with its complex character, has spawned a number of other issues that rank rather high on the Russian Foreign Policy list of priorities. These concerns deal almost exclusively with the Russian military and why the question of human rights violations was linked to the withdrawal of Russian forces from the three Baltic States. A discussion of the items most germane to the current debate include: (1) treatment of Russian soldiers, (2) adequate housing for the troops as they return to Russian soil, and (3) those who encourage prudence in the withdrawal of Russian soldiers.

1. Treatment Of Russian Soldiers

Russia contends that not only the civilian and retired military populations of ethnic Russians have been treated badly in the Baltic States, but the current active duty military are suffering similar abuses. The Russian government has therefore insisted that the Baltic governments protect and provide for these troops, or no further negotiation about time-tables or withdrawal can proceed.

Thousands of Russian troops remaining in the Baltics are dispirited and angry at the petty harassments and humiliations on the part of the newly independent states. Examples of these abuses were outlined in an interview with Lt. Gen. Fyodor I. Melnichuk, First Deputy Commander of Russian troops in the Baltics. Melnichuk complains that there is no agreement about how the troops should be treated and that many laws that concern them are adopted unilaterally. Other recurrent problems cited include: former Soviet military apartments have been confiscated by Latvia, and there have been cases of Latvians evicting Russian officers from flats vacated by other troops; no non-commissioned officer can walk through Latvian town without an accompanying officer; military trucks and cars are under constant surveillance resulting in numerous clashes; truck convoys are stopped at virtually every street corner and searched; electric power and water have been intentionally turned off at military installations; convoys have been shot at; and many officers, because of the sinking value of the Ruble, are

paid less than pensioners. Melnichuk believed the troops should be withdrawn, but stressed it should proceed in a civilized manner.¹⁰⁷

Although not elaborating on the conditions to which his troops have been subjected, Col. Gen. L. Maiorov, the Commander of Russia's Northwestern Group of Forces warned he would take resolute measures to defend military inventory, honor, and dignity of the troops.¹⁰⁸

The question of shabby treatment, and a concern for the dilapidating Russian army has not only been on the minds of the upper echelons of the military stationed in the Baltics, but on the minds of the rank and file and military pensioners as well. In a letter to the Russian Supreme Soviet Representatives from the Latvian Veterans and the Northwestern Group of Forces Officers Union outlined their grievances. They characterized withdrawal of forces as being hasty, premature, panicky and criminally disgraceful. They pointed to the horrendous living conditions military members and their families must endure and the fate of officers from disbanded units who now find themselves jobless, homeless, and without citizenship. They advocated taking steps to avert what they described as a vile capitulation by the Russian army and espoused that the withdrawal of troops be completed by 1997-1999 and only if all social injustices were resolved.¹⁰⁹

When addressing journalists, Commander-in-Chief of Russian Forces, Marshal Shaposhnikov, explained that none of the Russian troops is to blame for having been stationed in the Baltics and appeals to NATO and

CSCE cannot resolve the problem. He emphasized that only through talks can a compromise be reached.¹¹⁰

The frustration of ineffectual policies over troop withdrawals, and the treatment of the Russian military, was reflected in remarks by Russian Defense Minister Grachev. He said that indignation over moral pressure is growing among Russian servicemen in the Baltic States, where for instance, local banks refuse to give the soldiers their salaries sent from Russian banks. He urged the Congress either pull out the troops without delay, or allow them to stay on the condition that Russian servicemen be provided all social guarantees and their rights be observed.¹¹¹ The second alternative, of course, is the policy most feared by leaders of the Baltic States and casts suspicion on Russian intentions in the Baltic region.

General Grachev, again, had an opportunity to express his opinion on the treatment of Russian soldiers in the Baltics. During an address before the Seventh Congress of Russian People's Deputies, he said the military and their families must not be abandoned in some godforsaken place where the soldiers are suffering psychological abuse and not being paid. He said we are well aware of the attitudes of the Baltic State's leadership toward these forces, and no amount of persuasion and negotiation with these states has produced positive results. Grachev understands the wave of indignation felt by the troops in the Baltics and stands solidly behind them.¹¹²

2. Adequate Housing

Another severe problem faced by the Russian Defense Ministry, and a plausible reason for linking questions of troop withdrawal to the human rights issue, has been the tremendous pace with which the withdrawals in all former republics has occurred and the question of where to house them.

The Baltic States, as mentioned earlier, have not been extremely sympathetic with this Russian difficulty, but Lithuania has offered to contribute part of the funds toward building such housing.

The housing issue, just like the abuse of Russian forces, has created controversy and cast further doubt upon Russia's commitment to withdrawal.

In such a discussion, concerning adequate housing for returning soldiers, it is worthwhile to note approximately how many troops this entails.

Customarily, the Russians have always been tight lipped about matters pertaining to the military and defense. In the case of troop strength in the Baltics there seems to be continuity. When asked for precise and current figures for the troop presence in the Baltic region at the North Atlantic Assembly's seminar on Baltic security, the Russian representative simply did not reply.¹¹³

In past decades, Russian forces in this area numbered as high as 600,000, but 92 estimates put the figure at 130,000.¹¹⁴ When comparing this

with the overall estimated return of over 500,000 troops to Russian soil, it becomes clear why housing is such a problem.¹¹⁵

Currently, considering officers alone, there are more than 100,000 officers and their families that lack housing, and this figure is expected to double in 1993. The Yeltsin government has earmarked additional funding for housing construction to provide proper living conditions, but the efforts appear to have done little to resolve the problem.¹¹⁶

According to government estimates, it will cost over 47 billion Rubles to build housing for just officers and their families leaving the Baltic States. This would entail 6,914 leaving Estonia, 17,899 leaving Latvia, and 9,408 to leave Lithuania. To assist in this massive effort, Western financial aid has been offered once a troop withdrawal accord is hammered out.¹¹⁷

NATO headquarters has also taken issue with the debate on housing expressing its concern over the delays in withdrawal. A spokesman for NATO advised Russia not to delay the pullout despite the logistical problems it posed in housing returning troops.¹¹⁸ The U.S. State Department estimates that approximately 40% of the 130,000 troops have left, but this is combined with the hundreds of thousands being pulled out of Eastern Europe, and Russia is feeling the strain.¹¹⁹

At the local level, officers are also voicing concern at what they see as an untenable situation. One regimental chief of staff stationed in Lithuania said it was understandable why servicemen object to a speedy

withdrawal especially when new deployment bases are not yet ready. He indicated that if housing was not ready at his regiments new site, they would remain in Lithuania.¹²⁰

The Baltic States have started to recognize the importance in cooperating with Russia on the issue of housing if they harbor any hopes of being free from their Russian occupiers. Estonia has realized the predicament it faces in this regard, and delegations from both countries reached the decision to apply to the CSCE and other organizations for assistance in financing construction jobs.¹²¹

When interviewed, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Gromov said the housing problem was extremely urgent and needed to be resolved without fail. He stated that the number of servicemen without apartments in districts where it is planned to transfer these units varies between 2,000 and 19,000. A total of 1,600 apartment blocks, 580 facilities for services, and 2,500 storage facilities need to be built before 1995. To do all this, using the resources of the Ministry of Defense alone, is unrealistic.¹²²

Apart from the military's problems, there are even more complex reasons behind the lack of progress in building adequate housing. The disintegration of the Russian economy has disrupted material supply lines and thrown budgets and labor markets into chaos. Even the military high command has been, at times, less than helpful in pursuing these goals

and has used the issue of inadequate housing as a potential weapon to belabor civilian "politicians" and the existing process.

3. Prudence With Hasty Withdrawal

Hopefully, it is becoming apparent that, for a number of reasons, not everyone in the Russian government and military establishment is enthusiastic about removing Russian troops from the Baltic area.

A number of conservative political organizations and factions have sprouted on the Russian political landscape, but none have truly achieved a stable political base, nor a clean mandate from a sizeable constituency, to individually claim political power. Nonetheless, these organizations have taken various positions on political issues.

Previously, the paper mentioned organizations such as veterans groups and the Northwest Group of Forces Officers Union that have taken a very clear stand on the issue of troop withdrawal and human rights advocating that the pace, and even necessity, of troop withdrawal be reconsidered.

Other organizations and individual politicians have called for the same. Chairman, Victor Aksyuchits, of the Russian Christians Democratic Movement supported President Yeltsin's suspension of Baltic Troop withdrawal saying, "Russia should not permit the troop withdrawal to look like a panicky retreat."¹²³

The Baltic Region officers Assemblies Coordinating Council in a letter to the Seventh Congress of People's Deputies emphasized the security dilemma the Russian State faces as a result of the drawdown of Baltic forces. Flight time per aircraft is down to only 25-30 hours. Baltic ships are tied up in port with no fuel to sail, and ground units are not properly manned to organize field sorties.¹²⁴ In short, training has ground to a halt due to insufficient resources of manpower and material.

Reflecting on the double edged sword upon which the Russian military finds itself, Defense Minister Grachev commented that the military is being criticized for the undue haste in the withdrawal of forces, even though there are schedules for such withdrawals that have not been approved. On the other hand, the military is criticized for procrastinating.¹²⁵ Therein probably lies a truth to a situation fraught with many shades of gray, and that is, no matter what the Russian military does, it is bound to make at least one side or the other unhappy. No wonder so many are beginning to ask, why try?

C. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

To understand the Russian reluctance to leave the Baltic area, and why they may be using the issue of human rights as a pretense to maintain a presence there, the following items must be discussed to appreciate its strategic significance: (1) the various military installations, (2) strategic early warning site, and (3) the Baltics as a security buffer.

1. Military Installations

Despite all the official jargon, withdrawal of Russian forces is low on the Russian list of priorities, and the troops already withdrawn have been nothing more than a token gesture.¹²⁶

Major military installations are numerous and extensive. There are seven naval bases located in the Baltic region, counting the base at Kaliningrad. Lithuania has one site located at Klaipeda. Latvia has three sites in Liepaja, Ventspils, and Riga. Estonia brings in the rest with a site at Paldiski and another at Tallinn. The navy numbers approximately 87,000 sailors and airmen which are not likely to be included in the estimate of the roughly 130,000 troops attributed to the Northwest Group of Forces in the Baltics.¹²⁷

The navy base of Tallinn, located in Estonia, is the home port of the Northern Group of the Baltic Fleet and has some 70 ships of corvette size or smaller. Latvia is the base for more than 132 warships including the entire Baltic Fleet Submarine Force of 20 vessels located at Liepaja. Lithuania has a minimal naval presence of only about five ships.¹²⁸

In addition to its naval base, Kaliningrad Oblast contains three motorized-rifle divisions, two tank divisions, one artillery division, and one naval infantry coastal defense outfit. Altogether, these troops number at least 80,000 and they are also not counted in the 130,000 figure for the Baltics.¹²⁹

The three Baltic States house numerous other military organizations. Two airborne divisions, three fighter bomber air bases, one motorized-rifle division, and one naval infantry coastal defense outfit occupy Lithuania. There are four fighter bomber air bases, one air defense base, one tank division, and one ABM radar site at Skrunda in Latvia. Finally, Estonia has three air defense bases, two fighter bomber bases, and one motorized-rifle division.¹³⁰

2. Strategic Early Warning Radar

As can be seen from the proceeding section, the Russian military has a considerable investment in the Baltic States in terms of the facilities they have constructed and manpower it takes to make the machinery work. However, another huge investment that the Soviets made was the ballistic missile early warning radar site built at Skrunda in Latvia.

The operation at Skrunda represents a huge phased-array radar, and it is one of seven such radars used to warn the former Soviet Union of missile attack.¹³¹ The radar would be very expensive to relocate, and because the boundaries have moved, vis-a-vis the creation of the three independent Baltic States, Moscow is now facing a degradation in its early warning system because the Skrunda site no longer complies with the 1972 ABM treaty which says it must be located on the periphery of Russia.¹³² There was a time when latvia may have allowed Russia to operate the site in the interests of East-West stability, but that time has probably passed.¹³³

All the same, Russia has tried to maintain control of the site under the auspices and interests of global security, and that they pose no threat to the independence of Latvia.¹³⁴

3. Security Buffer

Russia has long been interested in providing a buffer around itself to discourage would be attackers. They have viewed the Baltics as a potential avenue of attack and have used the buffer concept in order to blunt an offensive blow should an attack occur. In this regard, Baltic Republics represented a sensitive security zone, off-limits to foreigners, with numerous restrictions placed on the local inhabitants. The Russians knew from their experiences in World War II, when Hitler's advance bottled up their Baltic fleet, that it would also present a tempting avenue of approach for NATO bombers.¹³⁵

The Baltic Military District was part of what formed the now obsolete Western Military District. They were considered second echelon troops that would follow behind the Groups of Forces used to spear head an attack on Europe. Now, because of the change in military balance, there is no longer a need for maintaining large numbers of ground forces in the Baltics, but Russians believe it would be in their best interests to maintain at least air and ballistic missile defenses, if not naval forces in the Baltic States.¹³⁶ Here is where world opinion and, more specifically, the opinions of the Baltic governments part company with the Russians.

D. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS: PRETENSE FOR AMBITION

As can be seen, the expenditure of money and manpower in the spheres of military and economic assets amassed by the former Soviet Union in the Baltic Republics represents an investment that the Russian government must find difficult to abandon. This paper has argued that the issue of human rights abuses, and discrimination of ethnic Russians in the Baltic States, is a political problem that could be used by some as a pretense for other foreign policy objectives that the Russians may seek. Very high on the list is their desire to maintain a presence in the Baltic States and their ability to continue influencing the course of events in those three countries. Nationalists are driven by a need to preserve, what they perceive to be, the interests of the Russian State in this region. This paper will look at those topics in the following order: (1) the shift in Russian policies/interests, and (2) the desire to maintain a presence in the Baltic area.

1. Russian Policies/Interests

In the days and months immediately after the fall of the Soviet Empire, the Yeltsin government had set two goals for Russia's recovery. The first was securing Russia's entry into the civilized community, and secondly, to enlist maximum support of Russia's efforts toward transformation into a democratic, market oriented country.¹³⁷ Russia pursued both of these foreign policy goals. In the process, they achieved the status of a world power,

secured pledges for substantial amounts of economic assistance, and was accepted as the legal successor to the Soviet Union.¹³⁸

On questions of foreign policy matters with the various CIS states, even though tough talk about protecting the rights of Russians living abroad can routinely be heard from conservative voices within the government, Foreign Minister Kozyrev has, himself, said that it rests within the best interests of Russia to avoid intrusive actions and abide by international law when dealing with their immediate neighbors.¹³⁹ But, the principle that human rights do not represent an internal issue to be left to the discretion of foreign governments, and the idea that a governments obligations to protect the rights of ethnic minorities takes precedence over national sovereignty, is gaining ground.¹⁴⁰

Concurrent with this line of reasoning, the voices in Russia for a more aggressive policy remain and grow even stronger. Russia's ties with members of the CIS are likely to remain a contentious topic for quite some time, and those who advocate a more intrusive and aggressive policy will probably find further justification for doing so.¹⁴¹

In the Baltics, this justification has come to represent the struggle between ethnic Russians and the alleged human rights violations they say are occurring.

The debate has naturally had quite a profound impact upon the foreign ministry and moderates within the government that would prefer a

less combative approach to Russian Foreign Policy. As the paper reported earlier, two main figures of this debate are the Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and Russian State Counselor Sergei Stankevich. Stankevich is a proponent for the creation of a new ministry for the affairs of the CIS to be placed under his control. Kozyrev, the voice of moderation, has opposed this move for it represents a setback of major proportions to Russian moderates and would herald a much more intrusive and coercive policy. Indeed, Stankevich has argued that Russia possesses no clear concept of its national interests. He believes Russian Foreign Policy with former republics calls for a special independent area of Russian Foreign Policy.¹⁴² Kozyrev, on the other hand, has warned that the military and security organs will step out of the moderates control and "sooner or later they will slough off the democratic skin that is an unnecessary nuisance to them."¹⁴³

It is difficult to estimate how long kozyrev will be able to maintain his position and his influence over foreign policy, but other powerful organizations are emerging that are gaining influence over the control and direction of Russian Foreign Policy.

One such organization is the Security Council. The Security Council and its chief, Yurii Skokov, had its powers expanded on 7 July 1992 by a decree signed by Yeltsin. A major provision of the decree directed the heads of all ministries to fulfill the orders of the council which some have compared to the old Politburo. When questioned about the Politburo

analogy, Skokov replied no such connection existed, but the Security Council represented a legally constituted body that guaranteed the president the opportunity of carrying out all measures to protect the interests of the state.¹⁴⁴ Stankevich and other conservatives have seized upon this as a tool for promoting their heavy handed approach to foreign policy.

Even with the creation of a second organization, the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, whose stated goal is to reduce the disagreement of various political factions by creating a stable political center in the pursuit of Russian Foreign Policy, the moderates are losing ground in their influence over foreign policy questions. National patriotic forces are gaining control over Russian Foreign Policy toward the former republics. This could most likely mean an increasingly active defense of the rights of ethnic Russians and less cooperation with the West. The moderates have done little to press their case and, in the process, have seen their political power and influence slip away. Oleg Rumyantsev, the executive secretary of the Supreme Soviet Constitutional committee observed: "The democrats have thoughtlessly handed over the idea of patriotism and national resurrection" to their conservative opponents.¹⁴⁵

In negotiations, specifically over the question of troop withdrawal in the Baltics, Russian policy has left little room for the Baltic

States to maneuver with the tough conditions they have proposed. The Baltics must agree to the following nine points:

1. Grant legal status to Russian forces for normal functioning.
2. For the time being, accept Russia's strategic installations.
3. Drop compensation claims for damages between 1940-91.
4. Assist in construction of housing for departing troops.
5. Guarantee transit rights for Kaliningrad military freight.
6. Provide compensation for property vacated by troops.
7. Guarantee social security/rights for retired officers.
8. Alter laws that infringe on rights of Russian-speakers.
9. Drop territorial claims on land USSR annexed after WWII.¹⁴⁶

Despite all of the optimistic statements from both the Yeltsin camp and the Baltic side for cooperation and the hope for a negotiated settlement, the Russian demands have remained very consistent and, for that matter, the Baltic counter Proposals have remained equally so. The real question in the minds of most Baltic leaders is what would be the consequences if they accede to the Russian demands? It is reasonable to say that Russia wants to continue its dominance of the Baltic States and, as long as they do, it is a safe bet that there is little the Baltic countries can do to make the Russians leave.¹⁴⁷ The peoples of the Baltic States, who must face the problems of the large troop presence on a daily basis, are undoubtedly aware of this fact.¹⁴⁸

With the expensive network of military bases positioned in the Baltics, Russia's Ministry of Defense has also played a key role in both the political debate as well as influencing Russian security policy. Generals sitting in the most powerful positions of the ministry have made it perfectly clear that they intend to both maintain Russia as a "great power" and stem the strategic retreat. They have also intimated, in this regard, that they consider the Baltic States to be a part of Moscow's "sphere of influence" and will not stand for any Western interference on this matter.¹⁴⁹

Baltic leaders fully understand such sentiments. They believe Russia plans to maintain its military presence because the region is vital to Russian security interests.¹⁵⁰ Russia has confirmed such suspicions insisting that it is in Russia's strategic interests to retain the radar station at Skrunda in addition to other key facilities.¹⁵¹

This tough, new language certainly suggests a new turn for Russian Foreign Policy as Moscow seeks to defend its own strategic interests against the claims of other former republics. It has raised eyebrows in Western governments that Russia has retained some of the Soviet Union's old habits including, a dictatorial negotiating style, and placing high priority on military interests.¹⁵²

Somewhat more difficult to prove, but just as worrisome to many, is the darker side of Russian policy. The possibility exists that Russian hardliners have used, or will use, remnants of the KGB, or other Russian

special forces, to foment ethnic conflict thereby giving the military further justification for intrusive actions.¹⁵³

Russia's interests do not run exclusively along the lines of military dominance, but there are also economic interests at stake that are vital to maintaining Russia's overall stability and security.

The Baltic States rely heavily on the import of Russian goods (62-65%). Conversely, then, it follows that the Russian economy relies heavily on exporting to the Baltic States. Not only are the exports important, but the sea lines of communication to the rest of Europe lie through the Baltic sea ports. Russia is vitally interested in continuing to use sea ports in the Ventspils, and Klaipėda for its oil export to the West. They also want to continue to use an oil refinery in Mazirki.¹⁵⁴

The point can be made that the Baltics have the most advanced part of the former USSR national economy, including some of the defense projects.¹⁵⁵ Over the last few decades, huge investments were made by the Soviets toward construction and upkeep of Baltic sea ports that was incomparable with the small contributions made by the Baltic republics. One of the most serious consequences of the Union's collapse has been to drastically cut Russia's access to the seas, fencing Russia off from other European countries and pushing it deeper into Eurasia.¹⁵⁶

From a foreign policy perspective, and keeping in mind Russia's best interests, which they will most certainly do, the President of the

European Bank, Attali said, "it would be a folly to fence Russia off from Europe. Similar attempts have always ended in War."¹⁵⁷

The world has come to think of the new Russia in terms of striving for democratic ideals and joining the world economy, but the fact remains that many Russians are still holding tightly to the old ways and are quite plain about what they want. This was the view of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Russia's Parliament pertaining to Russian Foreign policy and interests. They believe Russian foreign policy must be based on a principle that proclaims the entire geopolitical space of the former (Soviet) Union a sphere of vital interests, and that Russia must assume the role of political and military guarantor of stability on all the territory of the former USSR.¹⁵⁸ This goes well beyond the perfectly proper concerns of the Russian government for Russian minorities abroad.¹⁵⁹

2. Russian Presence

There have been numerous statements by government officials that advocate maintaining a Russian presence in the Baltics. This paper has discussed the possible policy issues that would motivate the Russians to remain, but there is also ample evidence to suggest that the human rights issue was the right cause at precisely the right time. All that remained for the military to do was jump on the wagon and help the conservative elements fan the flames of discontent already brewing inside the government.

The Russian military, for its part, has resented the recent depiction of the Baltic troops as an “occupying army.”¹⁶⁰ Historically, they have viewed their mission in the Baltic region as one of deterring aggression; protecting the motherland. Gorbachev said the troops should not be withdrawn from the Baltics since, in his view, they represented a “stabilizing factor” that could prevent a large-scale war.¹⁶¹

Stability is certainly a key factor in Russia’s beleaguered periphery. Given the human rights issue and the crescendo of recent events in the Baltics, Russia’s political elite might be worried that the Baltics could turn into a violent situation much like other ethnic disturbances have in former republics. Back in 1991, when things were looking bad in the Ukraine and Kazakhstan, Boris Yeltsin had threatened to intervene to annex predominantly Russian-speaking areas in the Ukraine and Kazakhstan. There is no question his behavior was less than diplomatic, but, at the time, he was also expressing a self-evident truth about what will happen when people start killing each other.¹⁶² Not many country’s military organizations will permit bloody disintegration if it possesses the ability to stop it. Should this start to occur, for example, in the Baltic States, the Russian military, like the armed forces in most countries, is willing to initiate the bloodshed to stop the disintegration.¹⁶³

Hopefully, the situation over human rights will resolve itself peacefully in the Baltic countries, but people must realize the Russian

military is prepared to take what measures are deemed necessary to secure the interests of the state and its people.

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, obviously referring to possible economic sanctions against the Baltics said that Russia would ideally like to get back all the Baltic, but in any event, it will submit to economic crisis, because no one can live without energy. He continued by saying Russia will not need a single soldier to solve the Baltic issue. Russia would make it so the Baltic States would ask to be taken back, only not as a republic, but as a Baltic governorate. All will be citizens of Russia.¹⁶⁴

In a similar vein, when Estonia was engaged in one of its many negotiating sessions with Russia, the draft of a Russian position paper indicated that Moscow thought the Baltic States should pay Russian troops to remain on their territories in order to guarantee their security.¹⁶⁵

Bearing down on the issue of human rights, Sergey Stepaskin, Chairman of the Russia Supreme Soviet Committee for Defense and Security, hinted at a continued presence in the Baltics when he said the people must know the Russian government would not abandon them to the whim of fate.¹⁶⁶

Returning from a tour of the Baltic States, the Director of the Norwegian Foreign policy Institute arrived at a similar conclusion. That being, the Russian command hopes "officially to prolong its military presence

in the Baltics just in case the Russian-speaking population becomes an object of repression.”¹⁶⁷

The Baltic countries have apparently, themselves, come to the same conclusion. Representatives from the Russian and Latvian parliaments stated that Russia has not utilized all of its alternatives for enabling the speedy withdrawal of Russian troops from Latvia.¹⁶⁸ The Lithuanian press secretary to Landsbergis said the Russians do not want to withdraw their troops, “they want to exploit the issue of social guarantees.”¹⁶⁹

Linking troop withdrawal negotiations with the issue of human rights in the Baltic States has been an especially worrying turn of events. Recent developments in Moscow’s relations with the Baltic States has been difficult to understand with respect to its current policies. The possibilities for these policies could be the result of :

- A genuine turn to the right for the Yeltsin government.
- Growing confusion between the people involved in negotiations with the Baltic States.
- A short term tactical ploy by yeltsin to defuse the nationalist right.¹⁷⁰

The problem has certainly kept the heads of government in the Baltic States engaged in a relentless pursuit to hammer out an agreement with the Russians for removal of the troops, but negotiations continue to break down, and a substantive agreement continues to allude even the most

dogged attempts to bring home a treaty. Latvia and Estonia representatives, experienced at the bargaining table, continue to argue that Russia is raising the human rights issues only to sustain its hegemony over the region and to delay withdrawing its forces.¹⁷¹

It is entirely possible that, eventually, the Russian soldiers will be gone. In its wake, they will leave behind a sizeable and worried Russian minority. If militant nationalists in Russia ever manage to oust Boris Yeltsin, they have promised to march the Troops back.¹⁷²

V. CONCLUSION

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, just as in other former republics of the old Soviet empire, and like Russia itself, face enormous challenges. They must embrace new economic concepts that offer tremendous opportunities for acceptance into the European community and portend a better life, full of promise and prosperity, for the citizens of these countries. By the same token, the course they have set for themselves requires difficult choices that have resulted in certain hardships and deprivations for the people.

Politically, the principles of democratic government they have envisioned for themselves, and are actively creating, seeks to protect the blessings of liberty and independence they fought so hard to achieve. During the struggle, Baltic patriots sacrificed their lives for the dream, but the quest for freedom did not die.

Culturally they seek to restore their heritage by reinvigorating their language, religion, customs, and traditions that were almost completely eradicated by the process of Russification carried out by the Soviet Regime.

They are proud people whose feelings of patriotism can now emerge unshackled by the reprieve they received from their imprisonment. With the sight of their countries flags flying high and the strains of national anthems, long silenced by their captors, being sung once again, the urges of

nationalism have begun tugging relentlessly at the coattails of those whose job it is to chart the new course.

Their “big brother” to the East has seen this kind of thing in the past and has seldom approved. Russia has also heard the cries of its people living in the Baltic region who claim to be disadvantaged by the new democracies, and it has not neglected their pleas for help.

The Baltic States, through a combination of their own doing and the stubborn refusal of Russia to negotiate, now find that the stirrings of nationalism, and their resentment for the Russian presence in those countries, may have put them in a situation where their desire to remove the last vestiges of the yoke of oppression, the Russian army, may have been placed in jeopardy.

Neither the Baltic States, nor Russia, because of the political and economic instability they both face, can afford to become embroiled in the issue of human rights violations of ethnic Russians.

For the Baltic’s part, if they cannot resolve the issue by legislating fair and equal citizenship and voting laws, as well as curbing the discriminatory behavior of their indigenous citizenry toward the Russian speaking non-citizens and the Russian military, they risk losing the independence and sovereignty they fought so hard to achieve.

For the Russian’s part, the issue of human rights violations has been the rallying cry for conservative elements of the Russian government who

resent the empire's collapse and the progressive direction it has taken toward democracy and capitalism. The issue has also provided the military with the perfect alibi for maintaining a presence in this region.

Elements in both the political and military spheres of the government have been greatly displeased with the retreat of Russian forces on the country's periphery. The practical issues of housing the returning soldiers and their families, the enormous investment in facilities, and the contentious issue of the shabby treatment and harassment the troops receive at the hands of the Baltic citizens, have pushed the conservative elements in Russia to the edge. Add to this the strategic imperatives that Russia perceives to be in its best interests, and all of a sudden the human rights issue seems like a legitimate reason with which to link the progress of troop withdrawal negotiations. It enables the Russian government to contemplate maintaining a continuous presence in the region through the foreign policy of protecting the human rights of ethnic Russians.

The Baltic States have much to fear in this respect. The remaining communists and nationalists, within the Russian government, are exerting increasing pressure on the Yeltsin administration pushing the President into making conservative decisions that some consider threatening to the democratic process in Russia. These decisions reflect badly on the stability of the Yeltsin government and the weakness of the country's democratic institutions.¹⁷³

The Russian government has been criticized by democratic forces within the intelligentsia of undemocratic tendencies, and with good reason. State Secretary Burbulis has made no attempt to conceal his desire to establish an authoritarian system, and presidential advisor Stankevich has called for a government with a strong central power base. Indeed, the Russian leadership seems to have inherited their communist predecessors lack of respect for the country's democratic undertakings.¹⁷⁴

Neither has the army been particularly reform minded. For now, senior officials within the military have judiciously refrained from exposing too many of their grievances and, when they have, it has been in the most circumspect manner. But, times are changing, and rapidly. In an interview with senior members of the Coordinating Council of Officers Assemblies of the Baltic Region, they expressed the opinion that the army has been overwhelmed. They felt if the process of the Army's disintegration was not stopped in the next three to five months, the army will be able to establish a dictatorship, and Grachev will no longer have to say the army supports the governments power. The army will take power itself.¹⁷⁵

There can be no question that the political situation, either in Russia, or the events taking place in the Baltic States, can give rise to any warm feelings over prospects of security, or regional stability. Both the Baltic States and Russia have sought the help of various European and international organizations such as the U. N., NATO, WEU, and CSCE to assist in resolving

the human rights question in the Baltics. But, in as much as they have looked to these organizations for their help, the fact remains that all sides must be willing to negotiate and seek compromise. If, on the other hand, Russia has no real intention of bargaining, but is simply stalling for time to retain troops in the region, there is little outside organizations can do to resolve the problem.¹⁷⁶

With ethnic tension and bloodshed occurring in numerous locations on Russia's periphery, the idea of Russia as the "big brother" and the illusion that ethnic nationalities could live in harmony with each other has been a notion that is still, in Russia today, hard to shed. In an interview with Andrei Zubov, a political scientist and expert in interethnic relations, he believed that peoples of the former USSR are accustomed to coexistence.¹⁷⁷ One cannot dispute that they are probably accustomed to coexistence, but one must also question if it has been an existence they like. It is easy to say you agree when being prodded by the pointy end of a bayonet.

Zubov feels that the ethnic statehood in the former USSR is absurd, and sooner or later a federation will emerge. The Baltic States, he reasoned, were close to economic collapse and he wondered if the masses are prepared to sacrifice welfare for language and national culture. He continued, saying any normal person who is prepared to sacrifice much for independence, but doesn't want to go hungry will, upon reflection, see the need for integration.¹⁷⁸

The Baltics on the one hand, and the Russians on the other, are talking, but neither side is listening to what the other is saying.

Mr Zubov, however, may have been most prophetic when addressing the issue of human rights and the possible direction this many faceted problem could take when he responded to a question about the reemergence of the USSR by saying, "the drama the Baltic republics are currently experiencing derives from their desire to become part of Europe; however, they are not conducting themselves as Europeans, above all with respect to their ethnic minorities. Yet if they resolve the problem, and integrate Russians, then they will willy-nilly gravitate to Russia and unity. If not, I fear the Baltics, and I especially mean Estonia and Latvia, as the situation in Lithuania is different, will become the theatre of the next conflict. Apartheid never ends peacefully."¹⁷⁹

This, sadly enough, would very much be to the liking of Russia's military and other conservatives. It would represent a tremendous shift in the direction of Russian foreign policy as well as present grave difficulties for Western governments in pursuit of regional stability. It would also provide the rationale necessary for Russian troops to maintain a presence in the region and could usher in a new era of antagonism and polarity reminiscent of the Cold War. Already things are cool. We can only hope that, in the future, the temperature does not continue to drop.

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